

A Brief Survey of the Bendall Manuscripts in the National Archives, Kathmandu

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One hundred years ago, the Sanskritist scholar Cecil Bendall of the University of Cambridge, in search of ancient manuscripts in Sanskrit, made a tour of research to Kathmandu to inspect the manuscript collection preserved in the chapel library of the Nepal royal family. Amongst old manuscripts of Buddhist texts written in styles ranging from Gupta to Early Nepalese script and dating back to before the tenth century, he discovered a rare cache of ancient manuscript fragments written on palm leaves.

These manuscripts, comprising both Buddhist as well as assorted non-Buddhist ones, were collectively referred to as 'Bendall's Puka.' One part of this collection was published by Bendall himself. After his death, another portion was published by his friend Louis de La Vallée Poussin to whom he had entrusted the manuscript photographs. Later, European, Indian and Japanese scholars who journeyed to Kathmandu would independently publish various portions of the manuscript collection, unaware that they were from the same collection that Bendall had earlier inspected. Inexplicably, though, some of the most rare and valuable items in that cache Bendall viewed in Kathmandu were largely forgotten by European and Nepalese scholars, and so have been lying dormant in Kathmandu ever since. As a scholar of early Indian Buddhist manuscripts, I was first attracted to the Bendall collection through microfilms I had obtained of the Kathmandu documents which, once I was able to identify them accurately, led to my publishing several successive reports in various journals.

1. Bendall's Tour of Research to Nepal, 1898–99

Bendall embarked for Bombay on 23 November 1898 and returned in February the following year. During that period he examined the ancient manuscripts preserved in the Durbar Library in the chapel of the Nepal royal family. The excitement his discovery caused him can be gleaned from the correspondence of 1 January 1899,¹ and from the transcript of his speech

1 Cecil Bendall, "Pāli MSS. in Nepal (Kathmandu, Jan. 1, 1899)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic*

before the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in February 1899.² In the first, he reports especially his discovery of an ancient manuscript in the Gupta script dating to the fifth century A.D. and a fragment of the *Cullavagga* from the *Pāli Vinaya*.

The manuscript he dates to the fifth century would seem to be the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* (see Matsuda 1996b). Bendall would later revise the dating of this manuscript in a later correspondence to the Royal Asiatic Society. In that correspondence,³ he relates that, in addition to the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* and *Cullavagga*, there seem to be fragments of other manuscripts, such as the *Saddharmapundarikasūtra* and *Bhikṣuṇīkarmavācānā*, of which the former dates to the sixth century A.D.,⁴ and that for the purposes of research he was able to borrow these manuscripts from the library.

Bendall was then in the midst of publishing a series on the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*,⁵ and actually published a single folio from the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* that he discovered in Kathmandu as the frontispiece to the volume. Though it is true that the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* cites the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, his use of this particular *Daśabhūmikasūtra* folio is actually wholly gratuitous, as he neither used it to edit the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* text, nor was it a volume dedicated to the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* but to the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*. We may conclude from the peculiar circumstance of this frontispiece that Bendall was, indeed, greatly excited by the discovery of such a rare manuscript fragment. Bendall subsequently published the manuscript fragments of the *Bhikṣuṇīkarmavācānā*⁶ and made a presentation on the *Cullavagga*⁷ before an international congress of orientalist, but never was able to publish his findings on the most significant of his discoveries, the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*,

Society of Great Britain & Ireland (1899), p. 422.

- 2 Cecil Bendal, "Remarks on the Results of Bendall's Recent Journey to Nepal in Search of Sanskrit Mss. and Inscriptions," *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, no. II (Feb. 1899), pp. 30–35.
- 3 Cecil Bendall, "Nepal MSS.," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* (1900), pp. 345–347.
- 4 Published in Z. Nakamura, "On the Four Sheets of Gilgit Manuscripts of the Saddharmapundarikasūtra in the Bill (sic) Library," *Añjali* (1970), pp. 63–74.
- 5 Cecil Bendall, *Śikṣāsamuccaya: Bibliotheca Buddhica* I (St. Petersburg, 1897–1902; rep. Tokyo, 1977).
- 6 Cecil Bendall, "Fragment of a Buddhist Ordination-Ritual in Sanskrit," *Album-Kern* (Leiden, 1903), pp. 373–376.
- 7 Cecil Bendall, "Note on the History of the Pāli Canon in Northern India, As Illustrated by a Fragment of the Vinaya-Piṭaka (from Cullavagga IV, V)," *Verhandlungen des XII International Orientalisten-Kongresses, Hamburg, Sept. 1902* (Leiden, 1904), pp. 58–60.

before his death in 1906 at age fifty.

2. The Sequel to the Bendall Manuscript Photographs

Bendall returned the actual manuscripts he borrowed from the Durbar Library, but not before he had photographs taken of them. After he died, these photographs were bequeathed to Louis de La Vallée Poussin, who referred to them as “Mss. Cecil Bendall.” Of these photographs, de La Vallée Poussin published one palm-leaf fragment of the *Samyuktāgama*,⁸ and in 1908 he published an unidentified fragment from the Mahāyāna Buddhist canon written in exactly the same script as the Gilgit manuscripts,⁹ later known as Gilgit/Bāmiyān Type I script. In his writings he further introduced the first half of the sixth *abhimukhī bhūmi* from Bendall’s *Daśabhūmikasūtra*.¹⁰ This fact is all the more remarkable in that his observations predate the first critically edited text of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* by J. Rahder by some thirteen years.

For de La Vallée Poussin this seems to have been the extent of his involvement with the Bendall manuscripts. Other than de La Vallée Poussin, there is to my knowledge only one other French scholar to whom de La Vallée Poussin showed the Bendall manuscripts, fragments of which were published in relation to the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*.¹¹ More recent scholarship by H. Amano has correctly demonstrated this to be the *Sphuṭārtha*, Haribhadra’s commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*.¹²

After de La Vallée Poussin’s death in 1938, the photographs went to Étienne Lamotte. Lamotte seems to have done no research on them, and subsequently the photographs went from his hands to the Seminar für Indologie und Buddhismuskunde der Universität Göttingen, where they are presently preserved.

When I visited Göttingen in 1991, I was kindly shown the Bendall

8 L. de La Vallée Poussin, “Mss. Cecil Bendall,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* (1907), pp. 375–379.

9 L. de La Vallée Poussin, “Mss. Cecil Bendall: (II) Fragments en écriture Gupta du Nord,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* (1908), pp. 45–53.

10 L. de La Vallée Poussin, *Bouddhisme. Études et Matériaux: Théorie des douze Causes* (London, 1913), p. 115ff.

11 M. P. Masson-Oursel, “Les Trois Corps du Bouddha,” *Journal Asiatique* (1913-II), pp. 598–618.

12 H. Amano, “A Fragment from the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra nāma Prajñāpāramitopadeśa-śāstra-vṛtti*, alias *Sphuṭārthā* of Haribhadra (in Japanese),” *Annual Report of the Tohoku Research Institute of Buddhist Culture*, vol. 3 (1961), pp. 1–25.

manuscript photographs by Dr. Klaus Wille and Dr. Jens-Uwe Hartmann (presently Professor, Universität München). There are only a scant twenty or thirty photographs that remain, and as I leafed through them I could not help but think that this could not have been all the photographs that Bendall was allowed. No doubt, over the years, a number of photographs have been lost as they passed from hand to hand. There are five different kinds of manuscripts that I have newly identified and published from the Bendall collection, but amongst those remaining at Göttingen I could find only the fragment of one folio of Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya*.¹³ Moreover, at the university there was no recollection of these photographs ever having belonged to the manuscripts that Bendall had investigated.

3. The Fate of the Bendall Manuscripts

After Bendall made his survey of these manuscripts, what happened to the actual documents in Kathmandu is another story. In 1915, as H. P. Śāstri was in the midst of compiling his two-volume catalogue of the Durbar Library, it was brought to his attention late in the process that there still remained another collection to be done. Śāstri remarks: "The following Palmleaf Mss. were shown by the librarian at the last moment, and they were said as belonging to Bendall's Puka, i.e., Mss. examined by the late Prof. Bendall at Cambridge."¹⁴ The manuscripts listed as Bendall's collection are almost all fragments and include Buddhist as well as nonbuddhist and/or unidentified works. Among the materials listed, the thirteen items from numbers 18 to 30 are undoubtedly identical with the works listed in Bendall's report. From this information I was able to conclude with fair certainty that the Bendall manuscript collection was preserved intact in Kathmandu.

Later on, the Durbar Library collection, amounting upward of 20,000 works, was transferred to the Bir Library in Kathmandu, affiliated with the university of that name, and from there to the National Archives in Nepal, where they are presently deposited.

The Bendall manuscripts were forgotten in Europe, and in Kathmandu, where the manuscripts were preserved, it had been forgotten that these particular manuscripts were the ones that Bendall had laboriously examined.

¹³ Matsuda and Steinkellner 1991.

¹⁴ H. P. Śāstri, *A Catalogue of Palm-Leaf & Selected Paper Mss. Belonging to the Durbar Library, Nepal*, vol. II (Calcutta, 1915), pp. 246–248.

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As the works in the Bendall collection comprise some of the oldest surviving manuscripts in Nepal, select items have been mounted in glass cases in the National Archives. As such they have invited the scrutiny of researchers, some of whom have published their findings, unaware of the fact that these were originally the Bendall manuscripts.

One notable instance that I am aware of is that of Sylvain Lévi who called on the Durbar Library in 1922 to examine the same manuscripts that Bendall had earlier investigated. Lévi later published one palm-leaf manuscript fragment of the Sanskrit *Upālisūtra* in the *Madhyamāgama*.¹⁵ One would think that he would have learnt of the manuscript from his colleague de La Vallée Poussin, who acquired the photographs of the manuscripts from Bendall, but Lévi gives no indication of this.

Next, in 1953, the Indian scholar P. V. Bapat published the four palm-leaf fragments of the *Cullavagga*,¹⁶ the work Bendall reports in his first communication. Very recently, Professor Dr. O. von Hinüber of the Universität Freiburg has published them anew.¹⁷ Both Bapat and von Hinüber were aware that these were Bendall manuscripts when they published them.

Finally, we come to the case of Z. Nakamura, Professor of Rissho University, Tokyo, who visited the Bir Library where he saw the Bendall manuscripts on display, and later published manuscript fragments of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra* and the *Ratnakūṭapariṣat*.¹⁸ Unaware of their provenance, though, Nakamura declared them both to be Gilgit manuscripts. While it is true that the fragments are written in the same Gilgit/Bāmiyān Type I script (Round Gupta script) as the Gilgit manuscripts, the Gilgit manuscripts were not discovered until 1931, whereas de La Vallée Poussin had already published the *Ratnakūṭapariṣat* in 1908.¹⁹ Nakamura is to be credited with correctly identifying the manuscript as the *Ratnakūṭapariṣat*, which even de La Vallée Poussin had been unable to do, but he is to be faulted for making the egregious claim of its being a Gilgit manuscript. One would think that the shadow of a doubt would cross the mind of the researcher as to

15 S. Lévi, "Notes Indiennes," *Journal Asiatique* (1925-I), pp. 17-69 (*Upālisūtra*, pp. 26-35).

16 P. V. Bapat, "A Pāli Manuscript in an Indian Script," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. XXXIII (1953), pp. 197-210.

17 O. von Hinüber, *The Oldest Pāli Manuscript: Four Folios of the Vinaya-Piṭaka from the National Archives, Kathmandu*, *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz, Geistes und Sozialwissenschaftliche Klasse*, 1991 Nr. 6.

18 Z. Nakamura *op. cit.*, and Nakamura "Gilgit Manuscript of the Mahāsannipāta-ratnakūṭasūtra, Kept in the National Archives, Kathmandu" (in Japanese), *Hokke-Bunka Kenkyū: Journal of Institute for the Comprehensive Study of Lotus Sutra*, No. 1, 1975, pp. 13-45.

19 L. de La Vallée Poussin, "Mss. Cecil Bendall: (II) Fragments en écriture Gupta du Nord," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* (1908), pp. 45-53.

why a Gilgit manuscript should possibly be in Nepal. That the same script was used for the Gilgit manuscripts only points to the fact that this particular script was used widely throughout the India and Nepal area during the same period of time. No doubt all of this confusion could well have been avoided had the good professor known about the Poussin paper. More recently, Hisashi Matsumura of Otsuma Womens University, Tokyo has published findings on the same fragment based on the Bendall manuscript photographs remaining in the Universität Göttingen.²⁰

The above report presents what has happened to the Bendall manuscripts in the years subsequent to Bendall's death, but there are to be found among its folios still a considerable number of sleeping treasures waiting to be uncovered. Indeed, that one item Bendall himself so keenly emphasised, the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, has remained unpublished led me to seek it out. My first strategy was to order all of the microfilms of documents possibly related to the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* in the manuscript fragments of the Bendall collection.²¹ What I discovered was that the collection had fallen into a terrible state of disarray, and that the whole collection was listed categorically under a single registration number: 3-737. Availing myself of the catalogue,²² I proceeded to order all manuscripts listed under 3-737 and was eventually able to obtain virtually the entire set. Setting myself to the task of reading the huge mound of microfilmed materials, I was rewarded my efforts by being able to publish reports on several important Sanskrit fragments I had newly identified: the *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra*,²³ Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya*,²⁴ the *Paryāyasamgrahaṇī* section of the *Yogācārabhūmi*,²⁵ the *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī* section of the *Yogācārabhūmi*,²⁶ the *Madhyamāgama*,²⁷ the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya*²⁸ and an unknown commentary to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.²⁹

20 H. Matsumura, "Marginalia to the Sanskrit Fragments of Some Buddhist Texts," *Central Asiatic Journal*, vol. 37, no. 1/2 (1993), pp. 120-149.

21 This list can presently be accessed via the concordance of R. Grünendahl, "A Concordance of H. P. Śāstri's Catalogue of the Durbar Library and the Microfilms of the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project," *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*, Supplementband 31 (Stuttgart, 1989).

22 *Brhatsūcīpattraṃ*, vol. VII, Parts 1, 2 & 3: *Bauddhaviśayaka* (Kathmandu, 1964-1966).

23 Matsuda and Toda 1991.

24 Matsuda and Steinkellner 1991.

25 Matsuda 1994.

26 Matsuda 1995. A citation of the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, it can also be regarded as a fragment of the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* itself.

27 Matsuda 1996a.

28 Matsuda 1997.

29 Matsuda 2000.

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Regarding the fragments contained in the Bendall Manuscripts, more information can be obtained from the research papers I have published to date; see list below. As the bulk of the studies were published in Japan, making them less accessible to those living outside of Japan, the author is pleased to provide photocopies of these materials to whomever should want them. Even with those studies published in Japanese, it is still possible for researchers to use to benefit the edited romanized Sanskrit texts contained in them.

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